



More than 350 people recently participated in the Harvesting Clean Energy conference, which seeks to identify opportunities for the agriculture and energy industries to advance rural economic development through clean energy.

Harvesting Clean Energy creates opportunities to advance rural development through clean energy

By [Marilyn Whitney](#) and [Rebecca Jones](#), *INL Communications & Governmental Affairs*

Agriculture historically evokes images of a rather messy business – working land and raising livestock. But at the 11th Harvesting Clean Energy conference, it was clear that the current and future state of agriculture, as far as energy is concerned, has the potential to be incredibly clean.

More than 350 western farmers, landowners, food processors, utilities and representatives of the clean energy industry gathered in Boise for the event. The annual conference seeks to create connections and identify opportunities for the agriculture and energy industries to advance rural economic development through clean energy.

This year's agenda included keynote presentations and plenary sessions on dairy sustainability and biofuels for aviation in addition to panel discussions and project overviews of solar and wind energy development, energy-efficiency opportunities and Idaho's unique geothermal projects.

INL was the platinum sponsor of this year's gathering. As one of the Department of Energy's ten national laboratories, INL scientists and researchers are working to advance renewable energy technologies and develop alternative energy sources. INL leads the nation's biomass feedstock harvesting research, is a principal player in regional geothermal research and development activities, and is developing techniques that can dramatically increase wind energy use in the Western United States.



Gov. Otter and John Grossenbacher share a word before delivering their keynote addresses at the 2011 Harvesting Clean Energy Conference.



Gov. Otter poses with winners of the 2011 Farm Energy Innovators awards who were honored for their work in agricultural energy production and use.

INL Lab Director John Grossenbacher provided a keynote address on "Optimizing the Region's Energy Resources" in which he highlighted the lab's responsibility to perform technology research, development, demonstration and deployment that benefits our communities, state, region, country and the world. INL speakers also included Chris Wright, Melinda Hamilton, David Anderson, Bob Breckenridge, Richard Holman and Kurt Myers.

Idaho Gov. C. L. "Butch" Otter also provided a keynote address in which he recounted the impact of clean energy on businesses such as Simplot – where he previously worked. The relationship between energy and the economy, he said, is a strong connection in every industry. "The energy in our economy is directly related to the energy we use in our economy," he said.

A highlight of the conference was Gov. Otter's presentation of the 2011 Farm Energy Innovators awards. Farmers from four Northwest states were recognized for their work in agricultural energy production and use. Those honored were Heglar Creek Farm in Declo, Idaho; Earl Fisher Biofuels in Chester, Mont.; Madison Farms in Echo, Ore.; and Vander Haak Dairy in Lynden, Wash. The honorees shared their farm energy plans during a panel discussion at the conference.

Idaho farmer Steve Ballard was among conference presenters. "For Ballard Family Dairy and Cheese, this is about becoming more sustainable," he said. "We are always looking at ways to produce energy more efficiently. The balance is we need to keep producing and keep our products affordable for our customers."

Among the topics highlighted at the conference were how to tap into USDA energy programs; insourcing efficiency, smart grid and manufacturing jobs; the Northwest power grid; and state-level best practices in rural energy development.



The conference included tours for attendees to get up close and personal with clean energy projects in Idaho. Destinations included dairy digesters; landfill and wastewater facilities; wind, solar, geothermal and energy efficiency projects; as well as Idaho Power Company's grid operations. *INL researcher Chris Wright joins a panel that presented on and discussed biofuel feedstocks.*

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